

Handbook of the New Library of Congress

Entering by either of the doors at the head of the staircase, the visitor at once steps out upon an embayed gallery, affording a spacious and uninterrupted view of the great domed reading room, or rotunda, which, in every sense, is the central and most important portion of the library. As such, it is marked by a magnificence **magnificence** of architecture and decoration nowhere else to be found in the building. Outside, from whatever direction one approaches, the gilded dome that forms its outer shell is the first thing to catch the **eye;** and the golden flame of the torch that surmounts the lantern indicates to the **passerby** ~~delete~~ **passer-by** at **at** once the central and the highest point of the whole structure. Within, richer materials have been used, and decoration has been more freely employed **than** **then** in any other part of the library. Sculptures and paintings, rare marbles, and a broad scheme of color and of ornamentation in stucco relief unite with a lofty architectural design to form what is one of the most notable interiors in the country.

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The Importance of the Rotunda. The detailed description of the rotunda

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may be deferred a **little** however, in order to explain its relationship to the rest of the building, and, especially, the reason for its central position. Besides accumulating books and providing students with proper accommodations for their work—such as a good light and convenient chairs and **tables -it** is the business of every **well-managed** **well managed** library to supply its readers with the books they desire in the shortest possible time and with the least possible amount of friction. A well-digested **catalogue** ~~catalog~~ is the first requisite; the second is that the books should be stored in a place as closely accessible to the reading room as possible. In a small library, this is a simple **matter** ~~add ;~~ the same room will be sufficient for both books and readers. When the number of volumes **increases** ~~Add ,~~ it

is necessary to shelve them in a compact system of bookcases called a “stack”—or, as in the Library of Congress, in a series of stacks—which must occupy a portion of the building by itself. The reading room and the stacks being thus separated, it is still the aim of the architect to place them in such a way as to retain as far as possible the practical convenience of the smaller library, where every reader is almost within reaching distance of every book. This end is most easily attained by adopting what is called the “central system” of library construction, which is the system followed in the Library of Congress. It has already been seen that the building ^{is} **ins** in the form of a cross enclosed within a rectangle, thus allowing space for four courts for light and air. At the ^{intersection} **intersections** of the arms of the cross is the rotunda, the main entrance to which ^{lowercase} is through the **West** arm of the cross. The other three arms are occupied by the stacks; the east stack, directly opposite, is the second short arm; the north and south stacks, each the same length, are the two long arms.